



Unit .02

Session .01

God Makes a Promise

Scripture



Genesis 12:1-4; 15:1-6

1 The LORD said to Abram: Go out from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land that I will show you. **2** I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. **3** I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you. **4** So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. ... **1** After these events, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield; your reward will be very

great. **2** But Abram said, "Lord God, what can you give me, since I am childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" **3** Abram continued, "Look, you have given me no offspring, so a slave born in my house will be my heir." **4** Now the word of the LORD came to him: "This one will not be your heir; instead, one who comes from your own body will be your heir." **5** He took him outside and said, "Look at the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "Your offspring will be that numerous." **6** Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him.

Intro Options



Main Point:
God established a covenant people to reverse the curse of sin.

Option 1

When you buy a ticket to see a movie, you trust that the theater will play that movie at the time you selected. When you download a new song, you trust that it will show up in your playlist. When you buy a backstage pass, you trust that the security and venue employees will allow you backstage to meet with the artist or band. Again and again, we buy items that only hold the promise of the event or product to come. We have to trust that the artist, the venue, and the theater will come through on their end of the deal.

- **What's the most recent movie you saw, concert you attended, or song you downloaded?**
- **When have you purchased a ticket or a download and something went wrong? What happened?**

God asked Abram to trust Him based only on His word that He would provide. But God wasn't asking Abram to spend a few dollars to attend an event or buy a song; He was asking Abram to leave behind everything He knew, only with a promise. We can look back this story and see God's faithfulness to bring a physical heir in Isaac, and we can look around us now to see how the promise for many descendants (physical and spiritual) is continually answered in the people of God. This should give us hope and confidence in God's faithfulness.

Option 2

Have you ever thought about the day you'll move out of your parents' house or go away to college? Right now, you probably know what to expect each day. You have someone who provides a home, food, clothes, and education for you. But when you leave your home, you'll step into the unknown. The unknown can be exciting, but it can also be incredibly scary! Sometimes it can even be tempting to stay where we're comfortable instead of taking the risk to step out on our own. But God calls us to obedience, no matter how risky or scary it may seem.

- **When has God called you to leave what's familiar for something unknown? How did you respond?**
- **When you think about the future now, are you more afraid or excited? How does it help you to know God is with you always?**

TEACHING PLAN

Several generations passed between the time of the flood and the opening of Genesis 12. The final thirty-eight chapters of Genesis focus on only four generations of a family, four patriarchs: Abram, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. This is telling. There is something important about this family, and we find out what it is in the opening four verses of this chapter. These verses record the Abrahamic covenant—an everlasting covenant God made with a man who most believe was a worshiper of pagan gods when God first spoke to him.

Read Genesis 12:1-4.



God began by calling on Abram to take a step of faith. Abram was to leave three things: his land, his relatives, and his father's house (v. 1). It might be difficult for us to appreciate the gravity of this calling. We live in a mobile society with much looser connections to family. But for Abram, this was a calling to leave everything he knew.

▪ What are some things you have had to give up to more faithfully follow God?

But God's considerable calling did not come without considerable promises. If Abram were to step out in faith and follow God, God would do three things for him. He would give him a new land, make him into a great nation, and bless him (v. 2). God would give Abram all that he left behind, but to a greater degree. But don't miss the word "will"—this word shows up eight times in verses 2 and 3. God *will* do this. When God spoke to Abram that day, He was inviting him to leave the sure for the unsure, the known for the unknown, what was in his hand for what God promised to do in the future. In that moment, Abram had to decide whether or not he trusted this God he just met.

Activity

Place students into groups of three to four. Then, ask them to think of a scene from a movie, in which the main character had to leave something or someone behind. Allow them a few minutes to choose a scene and act it out. Then, discuss what would have been difficult about that situation.

▪ How can God's future promises help you walk faithfully through current difficulties?

God was incredibly clear about the nature of the covenant relationship He was establishing. This was a unilateral covenant, meaning it would depend solely on God, without condition. Six times God said, "I will." Only once did He say "you will" to Abram, and that was in the context of what God would do through Abram rather than what Abram would do for God. God would accomplish it. Giving Abram a new land, growing a nation, and blessing him was God's project, not Abram's. It would be strictly an act of grace. 

▪ God was willing to accomplish for Abram what Abram couldn't accomplish for himself. What does this communicate about God's character?

COMMENTARY

Genesis 12:2-3.

Main Point:
God established a covenant people to reverse the curse of sin.

12:2. We can't miss God's promise to make Abram's name great (v. 2). This promise is juxtaposed with the account of the Tower of Babylon the chapter before. As people gathered in rebellion of God's command to scatter, they sought to build a tower reaching into the heavens to make a "name for [themselves]" (11:4)—to make their name great. So they worked together diligently to make that happen, but their work only brought them destruction and discipline.

But here, Abram wasn't the one working. God was determined to bless him and Abram would get a great name, not because of his effort or because he would seek it but simply by God's goodness and grace toward Him. Having a great name and blessings does not come by our efforts to reach up toward God; instead, it comes from God's graciousness to reach down to us.

12:2-3. God clarified something else important about His intention to make Abram's name great and bring blessing; something else that was lost on the masons laying bricks in vain pursuit of greatness. The blessing God promised to give Abram was not intended to end with him; rather, it was a means to an end. Abram would benefit from God's blessing but he would be a conduit of blessing, not its final recipient. God made much of Abram so Abram could in turn make much of Him.

We see this where God expanded on the blessing in store for Abram (v. 3). God would bless those who blessed Abram and curse those who treated him with contempt, and all the peoples on earth would be blessed through him. God had a blessing of protection in store for Abram, but more importantly, He had a blessing of provision in store for all of humanity. This promise takes us back to Genesis 3:15 and the offspring who would come from this nation promised to Abram, crush the head of the serpent, and bring about the greatest imaginable blessing to humanity. The blessing was not land, or even family, but redemption. The curse would be broken. Sin would be defeated. Death would be overcome. And all who would trust in the one coming—in Christ Jesus—would be blessed.



99 Essential Doctrines (p. 56, DDG)

God is Faithful

God's faithfulness means He keeps His word and always fulfills His promises (1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:13; 1 Pet. 4:19). God's faithfulness is demonstrated in His fulfillment of the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The apostle Paul linked the attribute of "faithful" to God's coming through on His word: "He who calls you is faithful; he will do it" (1 Thess. 5:24). We reflect God by keeping the promises we make to Him and to others.

TEACHING PLAN

Abram's calling was followed by his journey into the Negev (Gen. 12:5-9) and an excursion into Egypt during a famine where his trust in God's promises faltered (Gen. 12:10-20). Abram became worried that because his wife, Sarah, was so beautiful the Egyptians would kill him to take her as a wife. God had promised to protect Abram, but the patriarch acted out of fear instead and plotted with Sarah to lie and say she was his sister. When the deception was uncovered, the Pharaoh sent them away.

Read Genesis 15:1-6.



God came to Abram in a vision and told him he did not need to be afraid. But notice Abram did not respond with gratitude. His response dripped with cynicism and doubt: "You want to talk about great reward? What possible reward could you have in mind? You haven't even given me a single son, and yet you promised I would be a great nation." Here we see Abram beginning to develop his own plan to help God out. Without a son, Abram had chosen a slave in his house to be his heir. Abram would do on his own what God had not done for him.

▪ How have you tried to "help" God? How did it turn out?

So many times, we mistake God's apparent "inactivity" for His "inability." We think God is not working at all just because He is not working how or when we would like or expect. This often leads us to either anxiety or outright rejection as we try to take matters into our own hands.

▪ Which one of these are you more likely to experience: anxiety or rejection? How do both responses come from not trusting in God's future promises?

God responded in mercy and grace to Abram's disobedience. No, Eliezer would not be Abram's heir. God would give him a son from his own body. And then the Lord took Abram outside and invited him to count the stars. In that moment—as the patriarch gazed into the expanse of God's creation and was reminded of his Creator's capability—he believed. And God credited that belief as righteousness. Paul and James would later refer to this as Abram's moment of salvation—or more precisely, justification (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; Jas. 2:23). When Abram placed one foot in front of the other in obedience to God's calling in Genesis 12, he was exerting faith to some degree, but that was not saving faith. That was primarily an act of obedience. This moment under the starry night was different. Because of Abram's belief here, and only this belief, righteousness was credited to him.

▪ How has God been gracious to you during your own moments of disobedience?

Like Abram, we are called to trust the promises of God for our salvation. But we have a great advantage over the patriarch: his trust looked forward to what God would do; our trust looks back at what God has done. We trust in the fulfillment of the covenant Abram longed to see—the offspring who was born in Bethlehem, Jesus Christ. 

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God established a covenant people to reverse the curse of sin.

Genesis 15:1-6

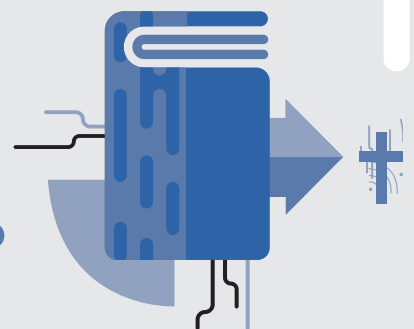
God reassured Abram that he would have children of his own. He would give him offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky. Not only did God restate this promise to Abram and his children repeatedly (Gen. 22:17; 26:4; 28:14), but He saw it through. Moses said, “The Lord your God has so multiplied you that today you are as numerous as the stars of the sky” (Deut. 1:10), and again later, “Your fathers went down to Egypt, 70 people in all, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars of the sky” (Deut. 10:22).

Paul made clear in Romans and Galatians that being the offspring of Abraham was not about your DNA, but about faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:11-12; Gal. 3:7). Paul’s argument here also helps us see how God will continue to fulfill His promise to make Abram’s offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky. Only those who share Abram’s faith are the sons of Abraham, and these will be an innumerable multitude in heaven from every people group on the planet (Rev. 7).

The Lord made this promise to Abram and demonstrated His commitment to keeping the promise through a covenant ceremony (like a wedding)(Gen. 15:7-21). Genesis 15:7-21 gives this account. God commanded Abram to bring Him certain animals and to cut them in half, except for the birds (15:10). Abram fell asleep, and the Lord told him about the future exodus from Egypt as well as the conquest of the Amorites in the promised land. The presence of the Lord—represented in a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch—then passed between the animal corpses. This act was like God saying to Abram, “Let this happen to Me if these things do not come true. Let Me be cut in pieces if I don’t uphold My end of the covenant.” The Lord was willing to take the covenant curses upon Himself if the covenant were broken, and that is exactly what He ended up doing at the cross.

Christ Connection *(p. 58, DDG)*

God promised Abraham that the world would be blessed through his descendants. Jesus Christ is the promised descendant of Abraham through whom salvation flows to the rest of the world.





GOD MAKES A PROMISE

God established a covenant people to reverse the curse of sin.

JESUS CONNECTION



God promised Abraham that the world would be blessed through his descendants. Jesus Christ is the promised descendant of Abraham through whom God will bring salvation to the rest of the world.



LIFEWISE QUALITY

HOPE – Expecting God will do what is best in every situation.



HEAD

Hope is the confident expectation and assurance that God is faithful to keep His promises, regardless of life's circumstances. How did God give Abram hope while he waited on God's promises?

Did Abram's hope ever waiver? Explain.



HEART

Hope is what keeps us focused and moving toward our God-given dreams and goals. Hope is what motivates us when things get tough and we want to give up. How can remembering God's faithfulness to you and others in the past bring comfort and hope when you are in the middle of a difficult situation?

God chose Abram and pursued a relationship with him. He does the same for us! How does knowing that God pursues you encourage you to trust in Him?



HANDS

What is one way you can remind yourself to have hope in God when you are going through a difficult situation? Find a Bible verse that will remind you of this unwavering hope we should have even when times are tough. Write it down on a notecard and give it to someone who could also use a reminder that God always keeps His promises. Possible verses for hope: Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 5:3-4; John 16:33.